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BETHESDA'S CRISIS IN 1791.
DISASTER TO WHITEFIELD'S HOUSE OF MERCY
AVERTED.

The story of Bethesda, the charitable institution founded by the Rev. George Whitefield more than a century and a half ago shortly after his arrival in Georgia, is generally well known; but there is one event in its history concerning which little has been said by any writer, and the reason for the omission is the lack of material necessary for a thorough understanding of the subject. The incident to which we refer is the management of the establishment by a certain Rev. John Johnson, and the trouble growing out of his connection with the Orphan Home and his control of the property through which it was supported.

Whitefield died on the 30th of September, 1770, and by his will he left Bethesda with all of its possessions "to that elect Lady, that Mother in Israel, that Mirror of true and undefiled religion, the Right Honorable Selina, Countess Dowager of Huntingdon," &c.; but soon afterwards all of the buildings were consumed by fire. Lady Huntingdon accepted the trust, and the work went on under her direction through persons placed in charge with her approval, but the property was again badly damaged by fire in 1773, and again rebuilt through her generosity and that of her friends. From time to time changes were made, for various causes, in the office of manager or superintendent until the period when the circumstances unfolded in the following documentary history arrived.

Just when Mr. Johnson appeared on the scene we do not know; but he was sent out from England in January, 1791, it seems as manager of the estate, and had full control of the property. As the Countess was an alien, an act of the legislature had to be passed in order that she could hold legal title, and by it the said estate was "vested in the said Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, any laws to the contrary notwithstanding," and trustees were appointed, in whose hands the sheriff was instructed to place one thousand pounds, the proceeds of the sale of confiscated property in Chatham County.

Lady Huntingdon died June 17, 1791, at which time the Rev. John Johnson was managing the Bethesda Home and plantation. The death of that good lady of course concluded the trust created as already shown, and a new act was passed, making the same trustees a corporate body with power to do all things "necessary and beneficial for carrying the original intention of the institution into full effect."

The original trustees who were therein reappointed were George Houstoun, William Stevens, William Gibbons, Sr., Joseph Habersham, Joseph Clay, Jr., William Gibbons, Jr., John Morel, Josiah Tattnall, Jr., John Milledge, James Whitefield, J. George Jones, Jacob Waldburger, and James Jackson.

After the death of the Countess, Johnson had instructions from England to continue his management of the property.

Johnson in his anger against the legally constituted trustees, wrote and published a poem called "The Rape of Bethesda; or The Georgia Orphan House Destroyed." The book is now very rare, and only a few copies can be located.

Comparative freedom from misfortune came to Bethesda when the management of her affairs passed into the Union Society; but the institution has had periodical seasons of adversity which we trust are now ended.

The originals from which the following record is made were offered for sale by a London bookseller, more than twenty years ago, and were bought by the Georgia Historical Society for a comparatively small sum. In concluding these prefatory remarks, we reproduce this short account of Mr. Johnson from the English Dictionary of National Biography, edited by Sidney Lee:

"JOHNSON, JOHN (d. 1804), dissenting minister, born near Norwich, was one of the first students of the Countess of Huntingdon's college at Trevecca, and a minister in her chapels. He settled at Wigan, Lancashire, and preached there and in neighboring towns. On one occasion his preaching caused a riotous disturbance. He moved to Tyldesley in the same county, and then, at Lady Huntingdon's desire, went to America to superintend an orphan asylum founded by Whitefield. The state authorities refused to recognize him, and he and his wife were imprisoned for resisting the sheriff's officers. On returning to England he was imprisoned for debts incurred in the erection of his chapel at Tyldesley. He subsequently settled at Manchester as pastor of St. George's Rochdale Road, where he gathered an appreciative congregation. He was a good Hebrew scholar, and on three occasions he preached to the Jews in that language. He published "The Levite's Journal," and a prospectus of a universal language. Other works were left in manuscript. He died at Manchester on 22d Sept. 1804."

EDITOR.

COPIED FROM THE LETTER BOOK OF THE REVEREND
JOHN JOHNSON.

Copy of a letter from Thomas Gibbons to Roger Smith,
Esq., of Charleston.

Savannah, January, 1791.

Sir:

Lady Huntingdon has been pleased to send out a letter of Attorney to me favor'd per the Rev. Mr. Johnson including that Gentleman with me to act in all matters respecting the Orphan House—was herewith furnished with a copy of a receipt of Mr. Glen's for the valuable papers which it mentions—upon application to Mr. Glen he informs me that he left the papers with you. I will be much obliged to you to forward me them as soon as convenient and a statement of such circumstances as comes within your recollection, as I am wholly unacquainted with the Business at present.

I forward a Letter to you which I presume is from her Ladyship.

I am Sir, Yours,

THOS. GIBBONS.

Extract of an act of Assembly respecting the Orphan House Estate.

..... "AND WHEREAS THERE is in this State a very considerable property, as well real as personal, known and distinguished by the name of Bethesda College or Orphan House Estate, originally intended for an Academy and devised in trust by the Late Rev. George Whitefield for literary and benevolent purposes to Selina, Countess of Huntingdon.....

Be it enacted by the authority aforesaid that the said Estate be vested in the said Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, any law to the contrary notwithstanding.

Georgia, February 1st, 1788.

OFFICIAL JOURNAL

1791.

Sept. 11th.

Was told of the Death of the Honorable Countess Dowager of Huntingdon by Mr. Thing after the forenoon service—found it confirmed by a Charleston paper the same evening.

Sept. 15th.

Thursday after it was in the Savannah Gazette with some little alteration in consequence of my observation on certain mistakes in the Charleston paper.

Sept. 17th.

Received a letter from Mr. Thomas Cahusac of London, with a brief account of L. H's. last moment by the Rev. Mr. Haweis.

Oct. 1st.

Was informed of General Jackson's determination to bring forward a motion in the next Gen'l Assembly for taking away the Orphan House Estate & of applying it to the purpose of an Academy for the County of Chatham—also of his preparations to enforce the same by showing an advertisement in some one of the northward papers exposing the Orphan House Estate for sale as private property—but knowing there was no real ground for the one; nor authority for the other I prepared to oppose, but having no official papers it was out of my power.

Oct. 2nd.

Found the clamor against Jackson & Clay, because the people were aware of their intention against the Orphan House; But in consequence of their declaration against any such intentions, Gen'l Jackson was elected one of the members of the House the next day.

Nov. 1st.

Tuesday—Preached at the Lutheran Church of Goshen, about 15 miles from Savannah; spent the evening and slept at the house of William Gibbons, Esq., one of the members of the House of Assembly for this County, who was to set off for Augusta the Thursday following in order to be ready for the meeting of the House the Monday after. Proposed a plan to counteract General Jackson's intention, but could not execute anything for want of a fresh power from Lord Dartmo', Sir Rich. Hill and others in time.

Nov. 21st.

Monday—Received an Official Letter giving a full and particular account of the Death of Lady Huntingdon with Power to assert the Trust in the Hands of Lord Dartmo', Sir Richard Hill & Clement Tudway, John Way & Oliver Cromwell, Esq.

Dec. 20th.

Tuesday—Rec'd a Letter from the Speaker of the House dated 10th of same inst.

(See Official Letters.)

True copy of a letter from the Speaker of the House of Assembly.

Augusta, 10th December, 1791.

Dear Sir:

A Bill has past the house of representatives, declaring the property vested in the Countess of Huntingdon to be a life Estate and vests the same in certain trustees by that act.

I shall not make any comment on the Bill but thought it my duty to inform you thus far.

My best wishes attend you and Mrs. Johnson, and

I remain Dear Sir;

Your hbl. Servant,

WILLIAM GIBBONS.

Dec. 26th.

Monday—Saw several of the Members return'd from Augusta—called upon Lawyer Gibbons, signified my determination of refusing possession and of making it a Question of Congress—promised him 50 guineas (in the presence of Mr. Owen) to assist me with his Counsel & to act as Attorney thro' the whole business.

Dec. 27th.

Tuesday—Went to inspect proceedings of the plantation. Went from there to the Orphan Home in the evening.

Dec. 28th.

Wednesday—Came to the plantation—determined to keep close possession by residing day & night Sunday & working day upon the premises to defend the negroes and ye remaining part of the evening—had reason to believe one black man came as a spy.

Dec. 29th.

Thursday—Found the negroes alarmed and determined to arm themselves—took a cutlass from one of the negroes telling him it was contrary to law.

Dec. 30th.

Friday—Kept a strict look out all day—but no attempt to take possession visible—Mrs. J. seeing one of the negroes return from breakfast with his hoe upon his shoulders—asked him why he carried his hoe, and received for answer “Don me no Misse War Time.”*

Dec. 31st.

Saturday—No attempts to take possession visible this day.

Jan. 1st, 1792.

Sunday—Had the pleasure of the company of Mr. Lewden, Capt. Hamilton, Mr. Keeves & Mr. Miller—about half past ten in the forenoon, Arthur Thewes & Michael Green came riding very hastily up to the back door, the former of which dismounted very suddenly turning his horse loose & on being asked what he wanted, showed great confusion—having my suspicions awake, I held out my positive determination to keep possession and that the negroes were also arming themselves & saying no Buckro (that is white man) should take them, this said he answered he was not afraid of any man upon God’s earth—feigned an inquiry after employment & that he had seen Mr. Thomas Gibbons, adding this, he expected I w’d have been in town—in short his whole conduct confirmed my suspicion of his being employed to take possession (contrary to law) on the Sabbath Day—however I gave him some rum & water but a day or two after (I am told) this same man went and made a false affidavit against me.

About one o’clock Mr. Blogg (with whom I had been in habit of friendship some time) accompanied with Mr. Nethercliff, Jr., came riding up to the front door—a friendly conversation took place upon the business in hand & after Mr. Nethercliff was introduced to me by my quondam friend. I ask if all the family was well and sent my compliments to them, but they also a day or two after in order to make themselves necessary to the Trustees (I am told) went & made false affidavits against me.

See extract in official letter &c., for the subject matter impressed into an affidavit against me by Messrs. Keeves, Blogg and Nethercliff.

Jan. 2nd.

Monday—Took away a musket from one of the negroes loaded with four ball,—received advice from Lawyer Gibbons to persevere in keeping possession.

*Don’t I know, Mistress, it is war time!

January 3rd.

Tuesday—Captain Hamilton dined with me this day & informed of Mr. Blogg's declaring in Savannah he w'd make affidavit I said on Sunday last I had put all the negroes under arms & that I had a design against the life of Mr. John Morell.

January 4th.

Wednesday—Kept a strict look out but no attempt to take possession visible.

January 5th.

Thursday—Sent to Lawyer Gibbons—received fresh matter of encouragement to persevere in keeping possession.

January 6th.

Friday—About 4 o'clock this afternoon, the sheriff's officer brought me a letter from Sir George Houstoun (enclosing a copy of the Act of Assembly) declaring the commissioners intention of coming in a body to take possession on Tuesday next.

January 7th.

Saturday—Had my suspicions that a Day was appointed in order to draw me off the premises; and put me off my guard.

January 8th.

Sunday—Had reason to believe an attempt was made to take possession, but my not going to Savannah, as usual, rendered it Abortive.

True copy of a letter from Sir George Houstoun, President of the Commissioners to J. Johnson.

Savannah, January 9th, 1792.

Sir:

We do ourselves the honor to inclose a copy of an act of the General Assembly respecting the Orphan House Estate and Bethesda College. The trustees will be at the Orphan House and plantation on Tuesday next to take possession of the Estate.....

It will be necessary that an Inventory of the whole property, should be delivered to them on that day.

It will naturally strike you that no property ought to be removed from the plantation without instructions from the Trustees.

We are Sir,

Your very humble servant on behalf of the Board,

GEORGE HOUSTOUN, Pres.

January 9th.

Monday—Wrote a letter in answer to Sir George's dated 7th, tho' it came to hand the evening of the 6th.

(See Official Letter.)

..... Lawyer Gibbons' advice superficial and discouraging.

True copy of my first letter to Sir George Houstoun, President of the body corporates.

January 9th, 1792.

Sir George:

To avoid a tedious circumlocution, I proceed to answer your letter to me in a style altogether pointed, nevertheless I hope you will do me the justice to believe I speak under the limitation of modesty and a suitable deference to an Honorable Gentleman, whom I'm sorry to find made president to execute an unworthy commission under the sanction of a public Act. And now if my feelings should betray me into a severity of Language I pre-engage your pardon, and can only say by way of apology, I am too independent in spirit to stand in awe of dust. The rectitude of your design in taking possession of the Orphan House Estate without a due course of law and before we reap that which we sowed, I question; as I do the ground upon which your pretensions claim foundation.

Is it your zeal for the object of a County Academy which urged you to attempt a fraud upon the public on both sides of the Atlantic? Or have you entirely forgot your obligations to the worthy founder of Bethesda that you would commit an act of such violence on his favorite design without the least compunction?

This is best known to God and your own conscience. However, it is well understood that in a representation, made from Georgia to the House of Commons in or about the year 1740. It was therein declared that the very existence of the then colony was in a great measure, if not wholly owing to the building and supporting of the Orphan House. I am well aware of your wish to call in the approbation of the public by saying the object of your design is the establishing of the Rev. George Whitefield's *will*; what an insult upon the common sense of that great and good divine. Tell it not in a land of equity! But they who attempt to give co-existence to contrarieties, and fail, may thank themselves for the little ceremony they deserve. Can it be supposed the Rev. George Whitefield would be so improvident as to devise property (worth so many thousands) in trust to the Countess

of Huntingdon, (who he had all the reason in the world to believe could not survive him but a very little time) and intend after her decease to make an orphan of the Orphan House itself and abandon so great a property, collected in charitable donations from different parts of the world, to the mercy of party rage; or the public of this State? Equity I trust will soon say no, to the confusion of your claim and if she should say no at your expense, you and the rest of the commissioners (as a body corporate) must say what then.

But We'll suppose for a moment I lose the man in the minister, and basely admit you, possession the object of your interest (whatever it be) stands insulted and dishonored by its own officious advocates while the scripture demands, in terms of the most severe rebuke, who hath required this at your hand. It is a vain oblation.

Now the well known act of 1788 relieves Bethesda from the sentence of confiscation and pursuing the intention of Whitefield vests the whole Estate in the Countess (not limiting her trust for life) who devised the same in trust (according to official papers now before me) to the Right Honbl. William Earl of Dartmouth, Sir Richard Hill, Bar't, and Clement Tudway, John Way and Oliver Cromwell, Esquires; and sorry I am Sir George, the Honorable House could not find some other way of quieting the worthy heirs of Zouberbuhler and of building a County Academy but at their expense. Had the Orphan House Estate ever interested the Countess' private purse, the explanation of the General Assembly would appear more plausible to the public, but it is well known by the thousands of pounds she has expended in the services of Bethesda that she was a slave to the trust confided in her. Yea, I may say in a certain sense she robbed churches to do the State of Georgia service, moreover the current of Bethesda's benevolence was never yet confined to a single county—may the thought awaken the sensibilities of every other county in Georgia, the Northern States and all the world! It is the voice of bleeding innocence!

How far the exhortation of Scriptures "be not forgetful to entertain Strangers," may politically apply to the infancy of this State I leave to the Judgment of the truly patriotic, but sure I am it is both unrighteous and impolitic to the last degree, to proscribe without mercy by an arbitrary explanation the vigorous intentions of the above Honorable trust. Be on your guard Sir George, the whole world will soon sit in Judgment upon your character in particular as president of such a Commission.

Did a certain person (with whom I would scorn to contend) think your Worthiness and honor necessary to varnish

over his party design, but I forbear; yet cannot help adding who are there in this state, but will commence wayfaring men, if their property must be left to the mercy of such interested explainers? O heavens! If this be the state of subordinate possessors what defence do they enjoy against the abuse of superior power? But to conclude.....

As the general assembly of this state has thought proper to explain away from the charitable public at large; and the private purses of the Rev. George Whitefield and Countess of Huntingdon, so many thousands; we shall not ask leave of thirteen commissioners to promote our appeal to Congress for an explanation of your explanation itself. 'Till then despair of possession Sir George, but if you attempt it tomorrow, I wish you to understand, I would much rather open my breast to your fatal steel than act unworthy of my present trust.

I am, Sir George, your most obedient Humble Servant,

J. JOHNSON.

N. B. If in consequence of my sober determination to keep possession, or of false reports, any unlawful advantages be taken by the inferior commissioners, or any person or persons employed by them; I shall imitate the conduct of one of old, who punished the Master for the disobedience of his scholars.

J. JOHNSON.

January 10th. Tuesday.

** (See extract in the Charleston Gazette and official letters, etc.)*

Before the commissioners left the premises I told them all I had full possession still. The sheriff's officer called the driver to hold his horse. I countermanded it and ordered another of the negroes to do it. About an hour after dinner I called all the negroes to work. The sheriff's officer immediately contradicted the order, but all the negroes obeyed me except the driver who I had reason to fear was either bribed, flattered or else very much intimidated by the Commissioners.

I also understand that the driver w'd unlock the barn door when the Commissioners came up to it, altho' it was quite contrary to my orders and that most of the negroes attempted to diswade and withhold him from it.

* Copied above.

About 8 o'clock this night two constables well armed were sent from Savannah by Joseph Clay, Jun'r to assist the sheriff's officer—one of them (quite drunk) when I opened the door & asked who was there, put the muzzle of his gun toward my breast and made answer "a friend to the State." I told them they might come in and stay a day or two with the sheriff's officer, but that I had possession there and was determined to keep it.

About half past eight the sheriff's officer went out in order to give the driver orders for the next day. I followed him immediately and gave contrary orders, we returned to the plantation house and the sheriffs and the sheriff's officer committed me to the custody of the two constables and went out again to enforce his orders, but the negroes declared they would die before they would serve him. On going to bed, found the lower part of my arm quite bloody, in consequences of a slight wound which I received in the upper part of my hand while scuffling with the sheriff's officer or with Mr. John Morell who presented his sword to my breast.

From the State Gazette of South Carolina, Thursday, Feb. 9th, 1792. Charleston, February 9th.

Extract of a letter from a gentleman in Savannah to his friend in this city, dated January 20, 1792.

"We are all confusion here, in consequence of a late act of the general assembly of this state, explaining away the transmarine trust of the Georgia Orphan House to thirteen commissioners of which Sir George Houstoun is president.

"On Tuesday the 10th of this inst., Sir George Houstoun, William Stevens, Jacob Waldburger, Joseph Habersham, Joseph Clay, Jr., John Morell, Josiah Tattnall, Jr., John Milledge, James Whitefield, Jr., Dr. John Brickell, Dr. Parker and a sheriff's officer, went to the house of the President, (the Rev. John Johnson) demanding possession without a due course of law. The president, out one of the windows remonstrated against their premature proceedings, alledging his three-fold claim to possession. First as agent for trust, and not for the heirs of Lady Huntingdon, which the act only excludes. Secondly, as not having beat out the crop he had sowed, in which case equity continues peaceable possession. Thirdly, as superintendent, not paid, besides having advanced near fifty pounds of his own money in different sums, at different times, without interest, still unpaid; and declared his intention on these three bottoms; or either of them, to refuse them possession, until they should gain it by an equitable decision of a jury. This said, the president was about to make his defence against the false affidavits of

Messrs. Keeves, Blogg and Nethercliff, who swore the president had put all the negroes under arms, and also, that he had a design against the life of one of the commissioners, (Mr. John Morell) in order to which, the president had a cutlass under his hand, and a musket by his side. The former he intended to make appear, was taken from one of the negroes four days before he saw Messrs. Keeves, Blogg and Nethercliff; and that out of the latter (which he took from another of the negroes the day after) were taken four balls—this he thought would sufficiently justify him from the charge of putting the negroes under arms, though they were determined to arm themselves, which was all the president said, adding, he could not help it. He also intended to shew, what he said respecting Mr. Morell was only in the mere pleasantry of these words, "There is no missing him." But before the president could make this latter part of his address, the sheriff's officer was ordered to force his way into the window; but was strongly resisted by the president, and failed in the attempt. Immediately upon this, some one or more of the commissioners broke open the door, and entering the house, insulted, assaulted, wounded and threatened the life of the president with a drawn sword presented to his breast. This done, they left the sheriff's officer in the house—went and turned all the negroes out of the barn, threatening them with the most inhuman severity if they obeyed the orders of the president any longer, which was enforced by Jacob Waldburger, who threatened also to bring the White Bluff company of militia against them if they did not obey the orders of the sheriff's officer. But the president still persisting in countermanding the orders of the sheriff's officer with effect, the latter attempted to drag he former out of the house, assaulting him and seizing him by the throat; but not being able, two constables ordered from Savannah came to his assistance about eight o'clock at night, and next day Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were violently dragged off the premises, and the former sent in the custody of an armed constable, was brought to Savannah, where he still remains a prisoner of honor in the house of Mr. Charles Scrimger. But what is very strange—all this violence has been done without any writ of ejectment, decision of jury, or shewing any authority from a magistrate.

The above letter* being much misrepresented, a copy of it was immediately taken, by a friend, to the Printers of the Georgia Gazette for publication.

*Referring to letter just preceding the extract from the South Carolina Gazette.

Inclosed is the following:

To the Printer of the Georgia Gazette:

Sir:

The Inclosed is a Copy of a Letter from the Rev. John Johnson to Sir George Houstoun, upon the latter's declared intention of taking possession of the Orphan House Estate.

The inserting of which in your next will much oblige,

Your Hbl. Servant,

A Correspondent.

Refused.

Contrary to the Constitution of this State.

Parson Johnson's compliments to the printer of the Georgia Gazette, requesting his acceptance of the following motto for his next public paper.

"Open to all parties—influenced by none."

Should be glad Mr. Johnson would call upon him about twelve o'clock this day, opposite the burying ground.

Monday, January 16th, 1792.

Refused.

True Copy of a note to the Public Printer.

January 11th.

Wednesday—This morning countermanding the orders of the sheriff's officer but the negroes were so horrified by his abuse & shreaking that they all except a few ran away into the woods without obeying either of us.

And about 2 o'clock this afternoon Mrs. J. and myself were violently dragged off the premises by the sheriff's officer and the two constables and I was sent to Savannah in the custody of one of them to a Commissioner of Justice.

January 12th.

Thursday—Still in custody in the home of Justice Lewden. Understand Boyd has been with the Commissioners this forenoon, and has obtained employment from them (as overseer) and paid to take possession of the plantation and negroes.

About half past three this afternoon Whitefield called upon me feigned great disgust at the conduct of Boyd, after having promised me so often before witnesses "he would not act against me".....gave Whitefield keys and power to take possession in my name before proposed witnesses and hastened him off to take possession on the premises before Boyd laying a strict charge upon him to be faithful

to me and the negroes which he promised to observe with the greatest solemnity; but about an hour after I was informed Whitefield had obtained a joint power with Boyd from the Commissioners a little time before I saw him. (I nevertheless hoped he would act for me.)

Was made to understand (thro' a certain medium) that the Commissioners proposed to make me President of their intended College—to give me 200Lbs. sterling a year and to pay my demand against Bethesda in case of my compliance with their proceedings.

.....This evening wrote a note to Way & Hills requesting a statement of his account with Bethesda..... about 9 o'clock was removed by leave of Justice Lewden to the house of Mr. Charles Scrimger and committed to his care as a prisoner of honor—but no charges are yet brought against me.

January 13th.

Friday—Wrote another letter to Sir George H. James and Nicholas Johnston, public printers have refused to print my first letter to him which has been much misrepresented, and I am denied the liberty of the Press—contrary to the Constitution of this State.

January 14th.

Saturday—Understand Boyd has collected some of the negroes in my name, tho' in reality acting for the Trustees appointed in the Act. Wrote a letter to William Stevens, Esq., (see Official Letter).....still in custody but no charges are yet brought against me.

January 15th.

Sunday—Was told the negroes are indeed collected together, but will not obey Boyd's command and that not anything has been done, but that which I ordered them to do, before I was dragged off the premises—also that Whitefield has betrayed my confidence by joining Boyd in the name of the Commissioners the evening of the same day he engaged to act for me.

And also that some written hand bills were posted in different parts of this city to the following effect.

"O Citizens of Georgia, let the Constitution reign and not men. The right of Jury and the Liberty of the Press are both denied a Reverend Stranger."

January 16th.

Monday—I am informed several of the Commissioners went out to the Orphan House Plantation this forenoon.still in custody, but no charges are yet brought against me.

True copy of a letter to Sir George Houstoun, President of the thirteen Commissioners.

Sir George:

Our subject of contention naturally supposes two different claims and it is well known that in the constitution of this state the right *of a jury* is to be held inviolate. Now sir, being your opposite claimant, I demand the legal and equitable decision of the same and assure you thro' this medium that no other can dispossess me, for tho' myself and Mrs. Johnson were violently dragged off the premises by the sheriff's officer and two constables, armed by the authority of the Commissioners—and myself sent in the custody of a civil officer to a commissioner of justice and tho' now held as his prisoners of honor in the house of Mr. Charles Scrimger, I do not consider myself as dispossessed. I have a person on the Estate (now in possession which I have never relinquished) acting for me with the best advantage he has.* But I wish you to know Sir George as I am officially sent here in the capacity of a prisoner, in that situation I am determined to remain, till I am committed more fully in consequence of charges Mr. Coxe said he had to bring against me by your order, or till I am officially discharged by that *power* which has deprived me of my liberty unjustly, and know also I shall certainly sue the body corporate hereafter for false imprisonment (tho' now for two years I am an outlaw and treated as such) in consequence of a certain clause in an Act of Assembly passed (horrid to think) in a free country. I thank you for your proposals made to me, and although you have no power, yet to make them, I treat your politeness with the respect it deserves—as politeness; but will not admit a temptation to betray my trust. However, Sir George I will meet your condescension as far as I can consistently putting on that cloth, which I am sorry my situation made it necessary for me to throw off for a while, I speak and act with decision; but am superior to malice. I admit an apology for the violence exercised by the Commissioners and others thro' the provocation too hastily assumed, on the misrepresentation of Messrs. Blogg and Nethercliff which I would much rather impute to the unfaithfulness of their memories, than the malice of their hearts.

The subject in hand is I am certain a question of Congress seeing I can prove from authority indisputable that the object of Bethesda's charity so far from being confin'd to a single state always looked with an Eye of Mercy to the

*Whitefield, [James], who went to London from this place with Mr. Phillips. See my journal, Jan. 15th.

first sources of her generosity—South Carolina, and the Northern States. Yea, the declared intention of Bethesda's worthy founder looked with compassion to the Indian—Orphans of the Creeks, Choctaws, Cherokees, &c. The Act of Assembly excluding the heirs of Lady Huntingdon does not apply to the exclusion of my present claim as agent for trust, but beside that I have two more founded upon equity, law & precedent, they who sow shall reap..... No common overseer can be legally dispossessed unpaid, but I promised to meet you, not as a suppliant, but rather as one who demands your obligations of honor as a body corporate—for quiet possession—till a legal decision of a jury puts the question beyond your or my dispute, and I will immediately do my endeavor to collect the negroes in mercy to their present distress, and I will give a regular account of all—to *those* who shall legally demand it. The face of the overseer you have appointed (tho' in his duty an honest man) unless he goes in my name, will drive away the negroes sooner than an army of soldiers. The motives of my objection are strong against your *conduct* as a system of the greatest violence and most dangerous in its consequences, you know Sir George my advantages; but, consider my demand upon your honor, in tenderness to yourself; and mercy to the poor negroes, who I am afraid will almost all fall a sacrifice to your contention with me.

Don't mention my demand against Bethesda, nor must you assume the privilege of paying me, till you first gain legal possession.

I am, Sir George,
Your most obed't servant,

J. JOHNSON.

Savannah, Jan. 13th, 1792.

P. S. The expense of procrastination will be very great. I must charge for the absence of all the negroes thro' your violence—for my own expenses as a prisoner and for every article consum'd by any officer or others you may put on the premises.

True copy of a letter to William Stephens, Esquire, one of the thirteen commissioners.

Savannah, Jan. 14th, 1792.

Sir:

The inclosed comes to your hand in mercy to Sir George's feelings who yesterday experienced a bereaving providence for which I am very sorry. God avert the im-

pending judgments which hang over the head of all who dare to take to themselves the houses of God in possession with such inhuman violence as you have shown to me. I am this moment inform'd Boyd is on the plantation, and has collected some of the negroes in my name; tho' acting in reality for the Commissioners, (horrid unfaithfulness); after pledging his word and honor to me so often before witnesses that he never would act till the business was legally settled—esteem such a man worthy of *trust* if you can.

Bring forward your charges against me, immediately—commit me to the common jail; or honorably acquit me. If you do the former, I shall soon prefer an indictment against you and others, for breaking open my house, insulting, assaulting, wounding me and threatening my life with a drawn sword presented to my breast—if the latter Boyd shall soon know who has possession still. But if you agree to the demand of the inclosed, my honor shall be your privilege, and I will subscribe myself ever your hbl. serv't.

J. JOHNSON.

P. S. I hope you will consider—I am detained from my ministerial duties, in consequence of custody at the expense of 10/6 per day.

January 17th.

Tuesday—Was called upon by a planter who had made proposals to the Commissioners to rent the Orphan House Estate at 200 lbs. sterling a year; but after knowing the situation of my claims declined having anything to do to it.

Justice Lewden called and spent the evening with me; promised to call a Counsel of Justices as soon as possible and demand the Commissioners charges against me.

January 18th.

Wednesday—I'm informed Boyd has quitted his employ under the Commissioners and that another overseer is there in his room—but the negroes still refused to work for any but me.

January 19.

Thursday—Understand some of the negroes are got to work this morning in consequence of the driver's declaring for the Commissioners, being either bribed by money, or overawed by fear. Also that the Commissioners who went out last Monday broke open the right wing of the Orphan House—forced open the lock of the store room and another of the closet and that the house has been plundered in consequence of their leaving the doors quite open.

Still in custody—no charges yet brought.

January 20th.

Friday—Have reason to believe the Commissioners intend to throw all the blame of my custody upon the Deputy Sheriff, who was this day sought for to explain his reason for putting me in custody, but was nowhere to be found.

January 21st.

Saturday—Wrote a letter to Lawyer Gibbons, received his answer—had a very short interview with him this afternoon, but no encouragement to expect any assistance from him.

(See Official Letter.)

.....find 2 hand bills were posted last night at the Vendue House to following effect:

(1st) "Great encouragement will be given to a public printer who is not influenced by any party.

(2nd.) "High Church, Lindsay and Fury.
Low Church, Johnson and Jury."

The Rev. Mr. Holbrook informed me this day that to his certain knowledge, a sheriff's officer was fined 90lbs. in Boston (about 3 years ago) for only lifting up the latch of a door—and that the plaintiff appealed to a superior court for further satisfaction notwithstanding the debt the officer seized for, was a just one.

True copy of a letter to the Mayor .

Savannah, Jan. 21st, 1792.

Sir:

Tho' but an inexperienced politician, I will readily pledge myself to meet the terrors of an arbitrary explanation with courage and composure. But it is possible one so independent as yourself, will deny me his counsel, because time has not yet disrobed my conduct of its formidable aspect. If it be as I am told, you have pledged your honor to the contrary party, I will remember my obligations to you still and admit the best apology I can. But if you come forward and prove the falsity of such a report my obligation of honor for fifty guineas, given before in the presence of Mr. Owens will perhaps be found as strong in your favor as any bond you have in your possession.

My present custody makes it impossible for me to come to you. Call upon me at the house of Mr. Charles Scrimger, opposite the burying ground, and I will soon show you some of your best advantages, against your worst enemies, but if

you refuse me this my humble request—my official journal which I must publish in my own defense, will be no compliment to your perseverance.

I am Sir, your most obed't hbl. serv't,

J. JOHNSON.

The Mayor's answer.

January 21st, 1792.

Sir:

Your letter of this date was this moment handed to me. I will call on you as soon as I can make it convenient.

I am not prompted to an interview from any motive of gain (or fear of any future publication.)

I am sir,

Your most humble serv't,

THOMAS GIBBONS.

January 22nd.

Sunday—Still in custody—find it rumored amongst my enemies, that my own counsellor is turned against me.

January 23rd.

Monday—Am informed the new overseer appointed by the Commissioners came to town this morning to inform them—none of the working negroes were to be found and that the driver himself was gone from the plantation.

This evening had an interview with the speaker of the house—am happy in finding him still my friend; altho' a false report was aimed to separate our friendship.

January 24th.

Tuesday—Was this day formally discharged from custody by Justice Lewden in the presence of John Beck and Charles Scrimger.

(See official letter for copy of my discharge.)

Received a subscription of 50 Dol. from a very worthy friend, towards carrying on a prosecution against the Commissioners.

Copy of J. Johnson's discharge from custody.

Savannah, Jan. 24th, 1792.

"I, William Lewden, Esquire, commissioner of justice for the City of Savannah, have held in custody from the 11th of this instant to the present time—pursuant to the order of John Coxe, Deputy Sheriff of this County, the Rev'd John Johnson officially delivered to me as a prisoner of honor

from the hand of one of the constables of this city. But having no charges brought against him, nor any reason to expect any will be laid before me, I do hereby acquit him from the above custody.

WILLIAM LEWDEN,

J. P.

Witnesses: CHARLES SCRIMGER
JOHN BECK

January 25th.

Wednesday—Offered a considerable fee to Matthew McAllister, Esq., Attorney at Law (& attorney Gen'l for the federal court) this day to take up the cause of Bethesda against the Commissioners, but did not agree.

January 26th.

Thursday—Ordered one of the negroes to fetch some small things of value out of one of the closets in the Orphan House—bought & paid for with my own money as per receipt now in my possession; but the things were seized as soon as brought to town and the negro put in prison by order of Sir George Houstoun.

January 27th.

Friday—Agreed with Lawyer McAllister to take up the cause of Bethesda and retained him with a fee of fifty dollars.

He informs me he finds six indictments against my opponents. Four criminal & two civil.

Copy of a power..... to Matthew McAllister, Esquire, Attorney at Law and Attorney General for the Federal Court.

I do hereby authorize and empower Matthew McAllister, Attorney at Law, to appear for me and take such measures, institute such process and proceedings in any of the Courts of Law, or equity in this state, relative to the Orphan House Estate, or Bethesda College, as to the said Matthew McAllister may appear legal and proper & tend to the benefit of the Trust reposed in me by Selina, Countess of Huntingdon & others.

Witness my hand this 27th day of January, 1792.

J. JOHNSON.

January 28th.

Saturday—Understand eight negroes broke out of prison last night, one of which was the negro belonging to the Orphan House put there on Thursday last.

Embarked on board the Eagle, Capt. Ross (bound for Charleston) in consequence of an alarm respecting the situation of Mr. R. S's affairs in whose hands the bonds belonging to L. H. are.

January 29th.

Sunday—Wind bound in the mouth of the Savannah near Tybee Island. A rough wind and boisterous sea threatened our advance into the ocean. Wrote a letter to Gen'l Wayne (at Philadelphia), one of the members of Congress for the State of Georgia.

(See official letter.)

Copy of a letter to the Hon'ble Anthony Wayne, member of Congress for the State of Georgia.

On Board the Eagle bound for Charleston, January 29th, 1792.

Honorable Sir:

The unexpected disappointment of General Jackson in losing that seat in Congress which you now have the honor to fill has been wreaked upon us with all the thunder of party rage. His conduct indeed puts me in mind of that of Antiochus Epiphanes who, disappointed in his ambitious designs against Egypt, let his vengeance fall without mercy upon the poor Jews. But this I enjoy (seeing I am made an outlaw for two years—denied the right of Jury and the Liberty of the Press) in consequence of his violence our antagonist has forged his thunderbolts at the expense of the constitution itself, so that Justice and Equity cannot but turn them all against the man who aimed them at us with so much scorn. A motion has been brought forward in the late House of Assembly here by the above gentleman (after pledging his honor to many that he had no such intention) explaining away the transmarine trust of the Georgia Orphan House Estate and applying it to a Chatham Academy. This wonderful piece of party chicanery is entitled "*An Act to Explain an Act*" and what is very remarkable after the House had decidedly exploded the idea of the property being given to the Countess of Huntingdon as *fee simple* directly turned the edge of their act against the heirs of Lady Huntingdon, as British subjects & non residents therefore aliens incapable of receiving and executing the same.

O! tell it not in the Northward States! An act was made in the General Assembly of Georgia in '88 and the meaning of it explained in '91, when perhaps not three persons who

were in the former house made a part of the General Assembly of the latter. How arbitrary and interested, such procedures! But how heavily the consequences are fallen upon me the enclosed will fully inform you, and (if you think proper) the public at large.

I am honored Sir,

Your most obed't humb. serv't,

J. JOHNSON.

January 30th.

Monday—Weighed anchor this afternoon. Sailed out to sea with a fair wind.

January 31st.

Tuesday—Encountered the disadvantage of a dead calm all last night, accompanied with a thick fog, but arrived at Charleston with a fair wind about 8 o'clock this night.

February 1st.

Wednesday—Feel myself a good deal recovered from the consequence of a horrible sea sickness. Took a view of the town, was introduced to & spent the evening with the Rev. Mr. Firman.

February 2nd.

Thursday—Called upon Roger Smith, Esq., took certain papers out of his hands belonging to the Countess of Huntingdon. Find he has negotiated *one bond*, all the Continental certificates, together with seven Carolina indents committed to his care for certain bonds, two of which I am afraid are not safe, and find the amount of the whole with interest to be considerably under eleven hundred pounds English sterling. To try their real worth I offered them for sale, but could not by any means get fifty per cent. for the bonds one with another.

Was offered 300 lbs. for your bonds by Mr. O'gear merch't in Charleston, who declared it was their full worth. In the evening called upon Colonel Laurens but he was out of town.

February 3rd.

Friday—Called upon Gen'l Pinckney this morning wishing him to take the bonds into his possession, and collect the payment of them as soon as convenient; but he refused to take them because he was afraid only two of them were good.

February 4th.

Saturday—Waited on Dr. Smith to know if he had a mortgage in his possession to secure *Eveleigh's bond* (as I had some reason to hope he had) but he was out of town and not expected to return for some days. Called again upon Colonel Laurens but he is still in the country.

Understand the Carolina indents sell at this time, at the rate of 50 per cent. and that they sold 5 months ago at the rate of 17/6 per pound sterling. What a pity Mr. R. S. negotiated them to such a disadvantage.

February 6th.

Monday—Embarked this forenoon for Savannah with a fair wind. Sailed close past the wreck of a fine vessel—one of the two lost on Saturday last passing Charleston Bar.

February 7th.

Tuesday—Arrived safe at Savannah after a very dangerous passage (in consequence of a thick fog at sea) about half past nine this night.

Found the city under arms occasioned by a riot among the sailors, determined to revenge the inhuman murder of three of their profession last Sunday night.

February 8th.

Wednesday—Understand the negroes would do no work during my absence and that all things are quite in confusion at the plantation.

February 9th.

Thursday—I am told the overseer which the Commissioners sent to manage the plantation furnished one of the negroes with a boat and sent him a fishing a few days ago, but he has never since been heard of. Called upon Lawyer McAllister this forenoon, find him encouraged to expect he shall bring the Commissioners to terms of accommodation on the principle of those in my second letter to Sir George Houstoun.

Find false reports circulating against me—"that the Sunday but one before last I held seditious correspondence with the Orphan House negroes in the road, and that I carried off several of the Orphan House negroes with me to Charleston."

February 10th.

Friday—Mr. Polhil informed me this day that he spent the evening of the 10th ult. with Gen'l Jackson and that he ran out vehemently against my first letter to Sir George, adding with an air of scorn (before a certain time) Johnson would be taken off the premises of the Orphan House Estate neck & heels; or words to the same effect, importing violence—and this was said in the audience of about five more, one whom was Lawyer Stirk—so it appears the violence of the Commissioners was premeditated. This will also justify the sheriff's officer from the charge of exceeding his order.

Called upon the Public Printer of this city & requested him in the audience of Mr. Clarke and Mr. Polhil to print some of my papers that the public might know thro' this medium the real situation of my claims; but received nothing but bad language and abuse.

February 11th.

Saturday—Received a hint from a certain friend that my life is in danger, requesting my not venturing myself abroad after dark—also intelligence from another that the case of my opponents is rendered so desperate in consequence of my standing out against them that they are trying to forge out an accusation against me tending to treason.

I am informed Mr. Milledge, one of the Commissioners, has ordered some of the moveables belonging to the O. H. Estate into his possession & that Boyd is cutting down some of the best trees on the Habersham tract.

February 13th.

Monday—The superior State Court beginning to-day I called upon Lawyer McAllister who informed me the Commissioners were then about to meet to consider of the terms above mentioned—amplified into a regular statement, in a letter he had laid before them.

February 14th.

Tuesday—Understand the Commissioners did not comply with my terms of accommodation yesterday. Ordered Mr. McA. to proceed in bringing forward the several.*

February 16th.

Thursday—Understand another of the O. H. negroes was brought to prison, prisoned this morning by Whitefield and Denceller.

*Here something is omitted.

February 18th.

Saturday—Saw the driver this afternoon. Says he was sent to take Sam out of prison, and that the jailor ordered him to flog him first which he refused to do, and came away without.

.....removed yesterday from Mr. Charles Scrimger's to a house in Johnson's Square but am obliged to borrow our furniture.

February 20th.

Monday—The business of the State Court is nearly ended and nothing has been done by Mr. McAllister against the Commissioners & I have neither seen, nor heard from him since I ordered him to proceed. This morning the negro who was brought to prison, last Thursday, came to me in a very miserable condition requesting my protection—says he received 100 lashes this morning by order of some one or more of the unmerciful usurpers.

February 27th.

Monday—Lawyer McAllister has never yet called upon me since I gave him positive orders to proceed against the Commissioners in the Superior Court of this State.

No accommodation on the plan I proposed is acceded to by them. The negroes are almost all off; and if something be not done in a few days we must inevitably lose the next year's crop.

February 28th.

Tuesday—Denceller (who holds as overseer, what the Commissioners wish to call possession) with another white man with him called upon me this morning & in the name of some of the Commissioners demanded the negroes which I had in my possession here in my house in town. I asked him by what authority. He said he had none but what he received by verbal order of the Trustees. I told him I desired their claim to the Estate and would only relinquish in consequence of a due course of law in their favor. That it was required of a steward that a man should be found faithful. That it was true I fed, harbored and protected the negroes which came to me, sometimes hungry and greatly distressed and would continue to do so, until I was legally dispossessed by an equitable decision of a jury. I then repeated my demand upon their honor for quiet possession till right & not force should determine the contest.

I'm informed the sheriff's officer made an attempt to take all the negroes out of our kitchen but was prevented by our precautions.

March 1st.

Thursday—This morning Betty a valuable negro wench belonging to the Orphan House Plantation came to me with breast *very very* much swollen & in smart fever—says she was taken from her sucking child & was brought to prison some time ago.

About 12 o'clock to-day a person came to inform me, the Commissioners were met and were about to issue out a warrant against me. I told him I was ready to meet it not only without fear, but with pleasure as I had a material objection to being plaintiff in the business.

March 2nd.

Friday—An advertisement appeared in yesterday's paper holding out certain intimidations against me and others who shall dare to oppose the unjust claims of the Commissioners—but I am determined to contradict it in the most public manner I can.

(See official letters & extract.)

March 6th.

Tuesday—Received two letters from London, one from the Rev. Mr. Haweis dated Oct. 29th—the other from Lady Ann Erskine dated Nov. 1st, 1791. But I am very sorry indeed no power of attorney accompanies them as I am afraid my opponents will by this time be able to produce legal proof of the death of Lady Huntingdon. Throw all the expenses of a lawsuit upon me & laugh all my expectations to scorn at the expense of not only dear Mr. Whitefield's original design; but of the gospel itself.

March 7th.

Wednesday—Have prepared an advertisement in opposition to that published on Thursday last by the Commissioners & putting it into the hands of one of the principal Mechanics to take it to the public printers for publication he was obliged to accept it for fear of offending the whole body of them.

March 8th.

Thursday—The Commissioners made a board this day & had the mortification to see their premature & unlawful proceedings contradicted in a public advertisement before they assembled.

(See official extract.)

March 9th.

Friday—Find a small poem called the *Rape of Bethesda*, is just published and announced for sale at Charleston—but have not received them yet.

March 10th.

Saturday—As the greatest part of the Commissioners are ungodly men and strangers to the blessed gospel, the more serious part of my friends begin to consider their conduct towards me, and the O. H. a system of persecution—heightened into violence so much the more as my plan of managing the negroes has differed from theirs with success.

Savannah, March 10th, 1792

P. S. Perhaps Lord Dartmouth or Sir Richard Hill will think it proper to lay these papers before the American Consul now in London & if so I should be very happy to meet his documents to Congress at Philadelphia.

J. JOHNSON.

N. B. The code of laws in Georgia are except in two or three local respects the same as those of Great Britain.

Apologise. (*Sic*)

Excuse whatever is incorrect in the above Journal, which I designed to be official; and not evangelical as my time is so much *limited*.

Should have wrote sooner but wished my account of the business to be as full as it was possible.